

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE B-7

WASHINGTON POST
30 MARCH 1977

Some Observations on Our Military's Remarkable Obedience to Civilian Masters

A Commentary
By Nicholas von Hoffman

President Carter's second choice for the CIA directorship has been confirmed by the Senate with only minor misgivings over Admiral Stansfield Turner's refusal to resign his commission in the Navy. Since the Navy and the CIA are ultimately supposed to be in the same business, you would assume it wouldn't matter if the agency's director were a military man on a leave of absence.

Is the objection to Turner merely the *reductio ad absurdum* of the conflict of interest idea or does it stem

Poster

from a general fear of "the military?" Despite our electing soldier heroes to the presidency from time to time, we have a traditional fear of Caesarism: The army coup d'etat, the military dictator or the creation of a dangerous professional army run by a quasi-fascist officer corps is a recurrent theme in the scare literature of our politics.

As the decades have passed since World War II, always with millions of men under arms and billions spent on the materiel of war, it has become a settled axiom that "the military" exercises an undue influence on our government and our national life in general. Thus, whether it is Nixon appointing Gen. Alexander Haig to the civilian post of White House chief of staff or Carter investing Admiral Turner with the purple sheet of command over all spooks, some of us

brace ourselves for the putsch which never comes.

Our admirals and generals are pussycats. Since Gen. Douglas MacArthur defied President Truman and paid for it by losing his command, no upper echelon officer has defied civilian authority. The admirals and the generals have been punctilious in observing their oaths to the Constitution. Indeed, the armed services are so obedient they may have unknowingly contributed to the false sense of omnipotence attributed to some of our recent presidents.

If you reflect on it, the behavior of the brass during the Vietnamese war was one of almost touching loyalty to our political institutions. The crazy civilians ordered them into a war which they weren't allowed to fight as they thought best and, in the ensuing stalemate, they absorbed a home front bombardment of ridicule and anger. Through it all the generals not only gave no thought to rebelling, they hardly ever even grumbled in public.

The good character and fidelity to constitutional principles of our officers aside, what might account for their failure to act as the military has in some European and South American countries? It's obvious that the telltale tight and tightly separated officer corps (with its allegiance to a special and private set of values) has never grown to full maturity here.

Many factors could contribute to that state of affairs: the ROTC programs, diluting the solidity of the service academy graduates; the absence in America of the kind of class structure that breeds politically destructive military elitism. Beyond that, though, there is the civilianization of our kind of war and our military institutions.

Modern warfare is too complicated for generals and admirals. The research, development, testing, procurement and often the use of many weapons systems is plainly beyond the military's training and talents. The Pentagon couldn't run without its masses of civilian technologists, its non-military, corporate contractees and the officers who have been sent outside the military system for civilian training in running the mass of complicat-

ed stuff that non-soldiers have set up. The officer who has to go to Cal Tech or the University of Wisconsin to get a Ph. D. in mathematics or chemistry or business administration absorbs and makes values and norms of his own which aren't compatible with the development of an isolated and dangerous officer class.

Past the pressure of technology to civilianize our organizations of war, there is the further fact that the major decisions regarding the Pentagon are too important economically to be left to the generals who would, in their narrow sense of mission, fail to see that defense is but one purpose of our perpetual war effort. Anyone with a television set knows, for instance, that the least critical aspect of the B-1 bomber decision is whether or not it can get inside the enemy lines to drop its radioactive eggs on Vladivostok. If the bomber never does any more than fly in V-formation at Veterans Day parades, it will have fulfilled its mission if it also puts the aircraft workers of Seattle and Southern California back to work. The civilian government, which won't create jobs to clean up the rivers and the air, will use the Pentagon for such a purpose.

When the draft was suspended, one of the arguments for moving to a volunteer army was that the draftees were too inflexible, too hard to train, too civilian. The new volunteer army was supposed to be a tougher, more disciplined fighting unit. That was why some people opposed it. They thought it would produce mindless janissaries who would do anything, obey any order as mercenaries are thought to act.

What happened is that the new recruits tend to treat their stint in the armed service more and more like civilian jobs. Even if the talk of forming a union comes to naught, the new emphasis on signing because it's steady work and you learn a trade tells what's happened to the old pre-Pearl Harbor lifer depicted in novels like "From Here to Eternity."

So don't worry if Admiral Turner won't resign from the Navy. The Navy has resigned from the Navy.